Site 736

JOHN PAUL II

Pope from 1978. John Paul (Karal Wajtyla) was born in Wadowice, near Krakow, Poland, May 18th, 1920 to working class parents. In 1938 he enrolled in the Jagiellonian University in Krakow to study poetry and drama, lifelong interests. Between 1950 and 1966 he published poems and periodicals under a pseudonym. During the German occupation he worked in stone quarries and a chemical factory and joined a clandestine Rhapsodic theater. In the fall of 1942 while continuing to work he registered in an underground seminary.

Ordained to priesthood in 1946, Wajtyla went to Rome to study theology at the Angelican University (now the Pontifical University of St. Thomas) where his doctoral dissertation was on the question of faith in the writings of the mystic St. John of the Cross. Returning to Krakow he earned a second doctorate for a thesis on the compatibility of the German phenomenologist Max Schelers' ethical system with traditional Christian ethics. In 1954, Wajtyla joined the philosophy faculty of the Catholic University of Lublin. Four years later he was named Auxiliary Bishop of Krakow and in 1964 became its Archbishop. He took active part in the 2nd Vatican Council (1962-1965) and contributed significantly to the council's pastoral constitution on the church in the modern world. Pope Paul VI created him Cardinal in 1967. After the "September" pontificate of John Paul I, Cardinal Wajtyla was chosen as his successor on October 16th, 1978. He was the 1st non-italian Pope since Hadrian (Adrian) VI of Utrecht (died 1523) and the first Polish Pope. He chose the name John Paul II to indicate he would carry on the programs of his three predecessors. John Paul however projected a cautious attitude toward change in the church, especially with regard to the role of priests. He insisted they not be "social or political leaders or officials of a temporal power". This policy led to a tense relationship with the Jesuit Order. He has become the most widely traveled Pope.

NOTE: Almost fatal attempt on his life May 13th, 1981.